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BAGHDAD FOR POL, POLMIL, NCT, IRMO

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PINS PINR PREL PTER IZ KDEM
SUBJECT: KIKRUK POLICE CHIEF ON KIRKUK SECURITY AND HIS IMPENDING RETIREMENT

REF: KIRKUK 00000139

CLASSIFIED BY: Jim Bigus, PRT Leader, POL, Department of State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Kirkuk police chief General Sherko Shirku told IPAO on July 25, 2006, that security is better in Kirkuk than most other places in Iraq. When informed that most sources thought security was deteriorating in recent months, he said he believed that was because two months ago Sadr said that the "Kurds were the enemies of Iraq and that Kirkuk would never become part of Kurdistan." Sherko said historically there has never been a problem between Shia and Sunni in Kirkuk but that Shia were now being expelled from the Hewija area. Sherko believed there were many Ba'ath members in the police force. When asked about the de-ba'athification process he avoided the question and said actually the main problem was that he had no power to fire policemen. He also complained that it took six months to hire new officers because of approvals needed from the MOI in Baghdad. When asked about the ethnic breakdown in the department Sherko said that Kurds patrol Kurdish areas and Arabs control Arab areas. He also admitted that he had not been in the Arab areas of Kirkuk Province in Hewija for years. General Sherko complained that the police couldn't do their best work because they are constrained by human rights issues and could not arrest or beat known terrorists.

(C) POLICE CHIEF'S RETIREMENT

¶2. (C) In March 2006, the Kirkuk provincial council announced General Sherko's retirement from the police force. At that time the council also heard speeches from 12 replacement candidates for the position of police chief. The council's action in March was taken only after several months of postponements and after three separate notices from the MOI in Baghdad insisting that Sherko retire. When asked about the process Sherko became defensive and said he would not retire and would remain in his position indefinitely.

(C) LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

¶3. (C) IPAO recently met separately with five top security leaders in Kirkuk including the heads of PUK and KDP Asayish, the Turcoman Deputy Police Chief, the PUK head of Emergency police, and the KDP general in command of provincial police. To varying degrees all commented that General Sherko was ineffective. Comments ranged from "worthless" and "an under zero rating" to derogatory references to his age and to the fact that he was useless. All leaders privately agreed without reservation that it was time for him to retire but noted that they were not willing to say anything publicly because they believed President Talabani protected him and that the American military preferred he remain. (Note. Sherko has on several occasions produced a letter from the coalition saying he should

remain in his position. End Note.) All five leaders stated he had little control over the force and that the regular police do not respect Sherko's orders. However, while all agreed he should be replaced there was little agreement as to who his successor should be.

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